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SUBJECT: GOVERNOR PLANS FOR A CLEANER, GREENER CAIRO

1. (U) Cairo Governor Abdel-Azim Wazir presented his vision for grappling with Cairo's burgeoning population, congested traffic, and environmental degradation in an April 30 meeting with former Ambassador to Egypt Frank Wisner and Management Counselor. Wazir's vision will be codified in a plan to make the city a more welcoming cultural and political capital, to be entitled "Cairo 2020" or "Cairo 2050."

POPULATION AND TRAFFIC CRUNCH TOP PRIORITIES

2. (U) Expressing frustration with the unregulated swelling of the 16-million person megalopolis with an estimated additional 3 million daily commuters, Wazir spoke of a plan to decrease the congestion in downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square by down-sizing two of its most infamous bureaucratic institutions: the 12,000 employee Mogamma, just steps from Embassy Cairo, and the 38,000 employee Ministry of Information Radio and Television Building. In addition to a proposed plan to move many of these employees to alternate locations, Wazir emphasized that the government is strictly enforcing a moratorium on building new government offices, factories, and schools. Greater Cairo is already home to seven universities, 3,316 schools, 460 hospitals, and 82 hotels, in addition to numerous government buildings.

3. (U) Wazir also stressed the importance of creating a new "Government Zone" to be constructed on outskirts of Cairo. Thirteen new ministry buildings are set to be built along the Ring Road, and the GOE is inviting foreign embassies to relocate there in coming years. Wazir hopes that this relocation, in addition to the commencement of the long awaited third phase of Cairo's subway line, will cut down on the estimated 1.6 million cars clogging the city's streets.

GOE TO ENGAGE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

4. (U) Wazir is hopeful that international cooperation and expertise can be employed to deal with some of Cairo's many environmental challenges. Three representatives from the Governor's office, including Deputy Governor General Abdel Hady Gad Al-Mawla, will represent Cairo at the mid-May "Large Cities Climate Summit" hosted in New York City by Mayor Bloomberg. The conference is part of a larger plan to provide technical assistance to large cities in reducing greenhouse gases by mobilizing international experts in areas like building efficiency, transport systems, renewable technologies, waste management, and water distribution. Partner cities will work with local technical experts to develop and implement programs to reduce emissions.

¶5. (U) Cairo's environmental challenges are enormous. To cite just one example, every fall since 1999, Cairenes witness a ghastly reminder of the horrific air pollution with the appearance of the infamous "black cloud," a toxic result of a mix of burning rice crop waste, auto and industrial pollution, and thermal inversion. A 2002 World Bank report estimates the cost of environmental degradation in Egypt is 16.4 million Egyptian pounds annually (USD 2.9 million).

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) While Cairo has seen some minor improvements in green space in recent years, such as the opening of the Aga Khan foundation's Al-Azhar Park, a far more coordinated plan addressing urban sprawl, under-regulated pollution, and chaotic traffic, is needed to effect any substantial change for the better.
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